

Och Aye! Understanding Weird Scottish Words and Phrases

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INTRODUCTION

“Tir gun chàinain, tir gun anam.”

Scottish Gaelic saying meaning, “A land without a language is a land without a soul.”

The Scots Tongue, v.

THE HISTORIC LANGUAGES OF SCOTLAND

Pictish

Gaelic

Northumbrian Old English → Scots

Cumbric/Cumbrian

Norse

SCOTTISH GAELIC

Scottish Gaelic is a Celtic language native to Scotland. It is a member of the Goidelic branch of the Celtic languages. Scottish Gaelic, like Modern Irish and Manx, developed out of Middle Irish.

Wikipedia, History of Scottish Gaelic

Gaelic came to Scotland with the Irish tribe the Scoti who arrived in Scotland and created the kingdom of Dál Riata in the 4th and 5th centuries.

By the 10th century, Gaelic had become the dominant language throughout northern and western Scotland in the Gaelo-Pictic Kingdom of Alba.

Gaelic began to be eclipsed as the dominant language during the reign of Malcolm III “Canmore” under the influence of his wife, Margaret of Wessex. In either 1068 or 1070, he married exiled Princess Margaret of Wessex who spoke no Gaelic, gave her sons Anglo-Saxon names rather than Gaelic names, and brought a large number of English to the Scottish court. Among these English included Norman families from the north of England – Bruce, Baliol, Grant, Fraser.

Scots: The Mither Tongue, p. 46

After Malcolm’s death, the Gaelic nobles backed his brother Donald Bàn rather than his sons. The sons fled to the English court and in 1097 returned with an Anglo-Norman army. Donald was overthrown, blinded, and cast into prison. He is considered the “last Celtic king of Scotland.”

Wikipedia, History of Scottish Gaelic

Gaelic is considered [of the two languages of Gaelic and Scots] the most venerable, most expressive, the most beautiful. It is also a dying language and has been declining for centuries.

SCOTS

Scots is recognized as an indigenous language of Scotland.

“A remarkable number of people, including many Scots themselves, have a hazy notion of what constitutes the Scots language.”
The Concise Scots Dictionary, p. vii

Scots is a West Germanic language variety spoken in Scotland and parts of Ulster.

Germanic languages:

North Germanic – Icelandic, Faroese, Danish, Norwegian, Swedish

West Germanic – Scots, English, Frisian, Dutch, Low German, German

Wikipedia, Scots Language

“Unlike Gaelic and English, Scots and English are closely related. They are complimentary—two branches of the same tree which nevertheless express very different world pictures.”

Scots: The Mither Tongue, p. 41

Modern Scots is a sister language of Modern English. The two languages diverged in the Early Middle English period (1250-1300).

Wikipedia, Scots Language

Scots was brought into Scotland by the Northumbrians.

Scots: The Mither Tongue, p. 46

Between the twelfth and eighteenth centuries contacts between Scotland and the Low Countries resulted in the large number of Dutch and Flemish words added to the Scots language.

The Concise Scots Dictionary, p. xv

In 1424, the stature of Scots was confirmed when it replaced Latin as the official language recording the statutes of the Scottish Parliament. From then on, Scots was the official language of state used for official records, administration, etc.

Scots: The Mither Tongue, p. 50

Scots is sometimes called Lowland Scots to differentiate from Scottish Gaelic.

Alternate names for Scots include:

Borders

Braid Scots (Broad Scots in English)

Inglis (name of Anglo-Saxon – Angle-ish)

Lallans (meaning “Lowlands” & non-Gaelic speaking)

Mither Tongue (Mother Tongue in English)

Scotch

Ullans (merging Ulster and Lallans refers to Scots spoken in Ulster, Ireland)

The Scots language in Scotland consists of four main dialects:

Insular

Northern

Central

Southern

Insular

The dialect of the Northern Isles, it is spoken on the Orkney and Shetland Islands. It differs significantly from the other dialects because of the recent and profound influence that the Norse language exercised there.

Scots: The Mither Tongue, p. 194

Northern

This dialect stretches from East Angus and the Mearns in the South to Caithness in the north and includes the northeast, Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire. "More than any other city, Aberdeen maintains close links with its hinterland."

Scots: The Mither Tongue, p. 189

Central

This dialect stretches from West Angus and Northeast Perthshire in the north, to Galloway and Ulster in the southwest and the River Tweed in the southeast. The dialect can be divided into three sub-divisions:

South Central Scots – West Dumfries, Galloway, Ulster, etc.

West Central Scots – Glaswegian dominates this area

East Central Scots – This dialect is most similar to early court Scots.

Scots: The Mither Tongue, p. 177

Southern

This is also known as Border Scots and is spoken in the counties of Roxburgh, Selkirk, and East Dumfriesshire. Apart from the old "Debatable Ground" where Scots and Cumbrian dialects mix, the dialects spoken on either side of the border are markedly different.

This dialect has noticeably different sounds from the other Scots dialects.

Scots: The Mither Tongue, p. 186

Modern authorities agree that the Scots language was gradually eclipsed after the adoption of the Protestant English Bible during the Scottish reformation and later because of the institutional dominance of southern English centered in London following the Union of the Crowns in 1603 and the Act of Union in 1707.

Scotticism

SCOTTISH GAELIC VOCABULARY

Athair	father, progenitor, or sire
Baisteach	baptismal, baptism (sàcramaid a' bhaistidh = sacrament of baptism)
Bothan, Bothy	a hut, often an illegal drinking place
Clachan	a small village or hamlet, usually with a church
Clann	children or family
Dun, Dum	from dun, a fort – like Dunbar, Dundee, Dunedin, Dumfries
Fillibeg	from fèileadh beag, a small kilt (modern kilt)
Filliemor	from fèileadh mor, big kilt or big wrap
Gillie	a boy or type of servant
Kil	from cill, a churchyard – like Kilbride
Leanabh-mic	a son, boy-child
Leanabh-nighinn	a daughter, girl-child (neaghin = lass; irinn, irghinn = girl)
Màthair	mother
Mod	from mòd, a festival, assembly, or court
Och	Irish and Scottish exclamation of regret, sorrow or longing
Oe	from ogha, grandchild

Paraiste, Parraist	a parish
Pòsadh	marriage, act of marrying
Pòsadh-bliadhna	hand-fasting
Sean Taigh	an old house
Sodger	from saighdear, a soldier
Tack & Tacksman	from Scots tak and Old Norse taka, a lessee
Teaghlach	a family or household
Tiomnadh	a will or testament
Tocher	from tachartas, dowry
Uachdaran	a laird, landowner, landlord, or proprietor

SCOTS VOCABULARY

Aith	oath
Amerced	fined or mulcted
Americament	a penalty inflicted
Anent	about, concerning
Aye	yes
Bairn	a young child, to impregnate
Bapteese, Bapteased	baptize, baptized
Bastart	bastard
Birlie, Birlie-coort	a court of country neighbours to settle local concerns
Brede, Bride	bride
Bridegruim	bridegroom
Brither	brother
Buiry, Buirit, Buiried	bury, buried
Fee	to hire the services of a farmer laborer or servant
Feu	a possession held on payment of a certain annual rent in grain or money
Feuar	a person holding a feu
Feu-Ferme/Farm	a mode of possessing land
Frae	from
Hae	have
Haund-fest, Haund-festin	hand-fasting, betrothal, trial marriage
Heir Portioner	one of the co-heirs who inherits part of a divided property
Heritor	a landholder in a parish
Husband Land	a division of land containing 26 acres
Huvnae	haven't
Ilk	n. family, race, sort, kind adj. each, every, same also, having a surname the same as the place of residence
Isna	is not
Isnae	isn't
Juist	just
Kirk	church
Lairdskip	the estate of a laird, a landed estate, a property and also the position of a laird, a lairdship or lordship
Leeve aff	lives on
Leeves	lives at
Leevin	a holding of land, a farm or estate
Luve-bairn	an illegitimate child

Maid bairn	girl child
Main bairn	boy child
Merrit, Mairrit, Waddit	married
Messuage	a dwelling house with its adjacent buildings and lands appropriated to the use of the household
Mither	mother
Mither-leid	mother tongue
Nane	none
Noo	now
Oor	our
Pairish, Pairishen	a parish
Pochle	to commit fraud
Portioner	one who possesses part of a property that had been originally divided among co-heirs
Quair	a number of printed or written pages bound together
Quairfoir	wherefor
Quat	forsake, give up, requite
Quha	who
Quhair	where
Quhalm	a qualm or uneasy feeling of doubt
Quhilk, Quilk, Qwilk, Whilk	which
Quhon	a few
Quine	a girl [used in northeast Scotland]
Quwh	such as who
Sasine, Seisin, Seizin	the act of giving legal possession of property and the instrument (document) by which such possession is proved. Seizin was originally not an estate, but a way to gain one, as by adverse possession. This is rooted in the Roman legal concept that whoever worked the land should be its owner.
Seised, Seized	given possession of legal property by legal authority
Set yersel' up o' sasines	register of sasines
Siclike	likewise
Skiver	a lazy person
Scran	food
Screivit	written
Stramash	a brawl
Tae	to
Telt	told
Testifeecate	a solemn declaration of fact put in writing; to bear witness, testify
Thon	that
Umquhile, Unquhile, Umquil	a common word used in testaments meaning deceased - former, the deceased, late, formerly
Wain	a child
Weemen, Weemen-fowk	women, female relatives
Wha	who
Wheesht	quiet
Whit	what
Widnae	would not
Ye	you
Yer	your
Yon	that

